

FCC Consumer Advisory

Careless Dialing Could Cost You Money

Be careful when placing collect or other operator-assisted calls, or you or the party you're calling may wind up paying more than you expected.

The unexpected charges may come as a result of a new scheme involving "fat-finger dialing." It goes something like this: You place a collect call from a public phone or payphone, intending to use a service like 1-800-CALL-ATT or 1-800-COLLECT. But you misspell or hit an incorrect button when dialing. You accidentally dial something like 1-800-CALLLAT. You get connected to the party you wished to call, but the phone company that connects you is not the one you thought you were using. Instead, it is a company that secured 800 numbers similar to well-known ones (*i.e.*, a company secures the number "800-CALLLAT"). The company is banking on the possibility that you might accidentally misdial your intended number. If this happens, you are probably unaware you are using a different phone carrier than the one you intended to use because you don't know you misdialed. Often, the company won't identify itself to you or the person receiving the collect call before connecting the call.

Surprise! The charge for the misdialed call is 2 to 3 times higher than it would have been had you reached the carrier you intended to use.

To Avoid the Scheme

CALLERS PLACING COLLECT CALLS:

- **Dial carefully.** Listen on the handset to make sure you hit each number only once. If you aren't sure you dialed correctly, hang up and start again.
- **Listen carefully.** Once you've made the call, listen for the provider identification. If you placed the call from a public (hotel, airport, etc.) phone or payphone, the FCC has rules that require the provider to orally identify itself before your call is connected and billed. The rules also require the provider to give you directions on how to determine the price of your call. If you don't hear a provider identification, ask the operator (if you are able to reach a live operator) who the provider is and what the rates are. If the provider or rate is not what you wanted, hang up and dial again. If you do not hear a provider identification and you can't reach an operator, hang up and dial again.

RECEIVERS OF COLLECT CALLS:

- **Listen carefully.** When a collect call is connected, listen for an identification of the service provider before accepting the charges. If you don't hear the provider identified, say "no" to the collect call until you're able to find out who is connecting the call. If it's a provider that's not familiar to you and/or you're not comfortable with, ask for the per-minute rates. If you don't get an answer, say "no" to the call. If possible, ask the person who is calling to call again using the intended provider.

(More)
→



- **Review phone bills carefully.** Although this won't necessarily prevent you from becoming a victim of this scheme, it may help you avoid it in the future. If you or your family frequently make collect or other operator-assisted calls from public phones or payphones, be aware of the dangers of "fat-finger dialing."

Filing a Complaint

If you suspect you're a victim of this scheme, contact the phone company that charged you for the call in question. The company's number should be listed on your phone bill.

In some cases, FCC rules may also protect you. You can file a complaint with the FCC by e-mail (fccinfo@fcc.gov), the Internet (www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html), telephone 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice, 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY, or mail (Federal Communications Commission, Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division, 445 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20554).

Your complaint letter should include:

- Name, address and telephone number where you can be reached during the business day;
- the telephone number involved with the complaint;
- as much specific information about the complaint as possible;
- a description of the steps you took to resolve the complaint;
- the names and telephone numbers of the company employees that you talked with in an effort to resolve the complaint, and the dates that you talked with these employees;
- copies of bills listing the disputed charges (circle the disputed charges on the copy of the bill); and
- the relief that you are requesting (such as adjustment of charges).

###

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print, or audio) please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an e-mail to FCC504@fcc.gov.

To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservic.html.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceeding or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

051502

